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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KHARTOUM 000814

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF S/E NATSIOS, AND AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND SHORTLEY
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN LEADERS WELCOME U.S. SUPPORT FOR DARFUR
INITIATIVE

REF: KHARTOUM 00813

Classified By: CDA Roberto Powers, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) has deployed teams to Darfur and Chad to try to gain support for a planned conference of Darfur rebel groups to be held somewhere in southern Sudan by mid-June. Senior SPLM officials welcomed a strong message of U.S. support for their initiative, which they admit is still taking shape. The SPLM hopes the conference will foster a more unified political position among the Darfur groups, drawing on the experience of the SPLM and other former rebels who have overcome internal discord to develop a more unified political strategy and participate in successful negotiations. The SPLM would "take the lead" in encouraging a broader consensus among the Darfur groups, officials said. The SPLM's efforts would occur in the "context of the UN/AU initiative, they added, and would help lay the groundwork for ultimate UN/AU mediation between the rebels and Khartoum. End Summary.

SPLM Welcomes U.S. Support

¶2. (C) Visiting State Department Senior Representative to Sudan Director Lauren Landis delivered a message of strong U.S. support for the SPLM initiative in meetings with senior officials in Juba May 20. Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) Minister of Presidential Affairs Dr. Luka Biong Deng welcomed Landis' message, which he promised to deliver immediately to GOSS President Salva Kiir. Biong reiterated that GOSS/SPLM needs political and "logistical" support from the United States, along with shared intelligence on the various Darfur factions, their objectives, and their actions on the ground (Ref. A). GOSS Minister for Regional Cooperation Dr. Barnabas Marial Benjamin also participated in the two-hour meeting, together with Dr. Achier Deng Akol, Secretary of the SPLM's Task Force on Darfur (TDF). (Note:

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Following meetings with the SPLM Taskforce, the UN and AU told donor governments in Khartoum that they will provide technical and logistical assistance to the SPLM for the meeting in Southern Sudan. In consultation with the SPLM, the UN and AU will present a list of specific requests for additional support from the international community in the near future. The USG should be prepared to respond to this request. End note.)

Evolving Plans

¶3. (C) The SPLM's seven-person Task Force on Darfur (TFD) has currently divided into two groups, Biong said. A group led by former SPLM director of external security Edward Lino has traveled to Darfur, with assistance from UNMIS, and is attempting to identify appropriate political, military, traditional and civil society leaders to invite to the conference. A second group, under the GOSS president's Special Envoy for Darfur, Rev. Clement Janda, was expected to travel to Chad on May 21 for further consultations with officials there. The group is expected to report back to Kiir on or about May 26.

¶4. (C) Biong added that GOSS/SPLM also hopes to organize a "preliminary conference" by June 4, which would bring together several of the key players to plan the larger conference. The target date for the full conference is June

¶15. "Resource experts" (apparently a reference to donors) will be invited to the preliminary conference, Biong said. Benjamin added that SPLM/GOSS wants the United States involved "from the beginning."

¶5. (C) The SPLM has established contact with "most of the rebels," Biong asserted, and most have indicated willingness to participate. Some Darfur rebel leaders have quietly visited Juba over the last two months and GOSS/SPLM has met with others in a variety of venues, including Ndjamen, Cairo and Tripoli, Biong recalled. Kiir himself has played a key role in laying the groundwork for the GOSS/SPLM initiatives in visits to Ndjamen, Cairo and Asmara. GOSS/SPLM plans are still taking shape, Biong admitted. The basic idea is to bring the various Darfur "movements" together with

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representatives from civil society and traditional leaders. Military commanders should hear from a broader cross-section of Darfur society in order for them to be persuaded to negotiate, Biong argued. And with broad participation, it is hoped, the various Darfur factions can move toward a common political strategy and prepare for coherent, comprehensive negotiations with Khartoum.

¶6. (C) Once the Darfurians assemble, the SPLM would explain the heavy toll that disunity exacted on the SPLM's liberation struggle, Biong added. GOSS/SPLM will also bring in representatives of other liberation groups with similar histories of internal divisions. It is not certain how long the conference will last, Biong said, but organizers are budgeting for up to two weeks.

¶7. (C) Initial discussions with Darfur parties would take place "outside of the context of the CPA and the DPA," Biong said. While GOSS and the SPLM have publicly endorsed the DPA, the SPLM is reluctant to set preconditions on what the parties talk about. The SPLM was late to arrive at DPA negotiations in Abuja, Biong recalled, and their participation in Abuja and endorsement of the DPA has been a handicap in their relations with some Darfur rebel leaders and groups.

Defusing NCP Hostility

¶8. (C) The GOSS/SPLM officials admitted that relations with Khartoum have been strained over the SPLM's Darfur initiative. UN Envoy Jan Eliasson reported that President Omar Bashir was "pleased" by the SPLM's efforts, Biong revealed. Biong added that he recently met with Director for Security and Military Intelligence Gen. Salah Ghosh for the first time. Biong said Ghosh was dismissive of the SPLM's efforts in Darfur, asking "what can you offer?" and pointing

out that while the National Congress Party holds 52 percent of national power, the SPLM wields only 28 percent. Biong said he told Ghosh that Khartoum has "lost credibility" on the Darfur issue and should "hand the file to the SPLM." SPLM would nevertheless like the NCP to join in the Darfur conference, Biong said, even if they merely participate as observers. Biong added that the SPLM would like to establish a joint SPLM/NCP "political committee" to assist the Darfur initiative.

¶9. (C) The SPLM is also seeking a neutral and respected figure to chair the conference, the officials revealed. Former Sudanese vice president Abel Alier has been approached to assist, and the SPLM will also reach out to prominent academic Francis Deng. Neither has yet confirmed participation. "We need a figure who puts people at ease," including the rebel factions and the NCP, Biong said. Kenyan retired general Lazarus Sumbeiywo, who mediated the CPA, could also play a useful role, Biong continued. If the conference leads to direct negotiations between the Darfur parties and Khartoum, more senior national and international figures should step in to chair the process, and the UN/AU should take center stage, Benjamin said. Bashir, Salva Kiir, Chad's Idriss Deby, Eritrea's Isaias Afwerki will need defined roles, Benjamin added. Without leadership and cooperation at the head of state/head of government level, the process will fail, Benjamin argued.

International Factors

¶10. (C) Biong recalled that in a recent meeting with GOSS President Kiir, Chad's Idriss Deby claimed that Bashir had spent USD 500,000 attempting to overthrow him. Bashir's Minister of Presidential Affairs Maj. Gen. Bakri Hassan Salih was present for this exchange, Biong said. Kiir subsequently informed Bashir that Deby supports the SPLM initiative, and has an invitation to visit Juba. Bashir did not object to the proposed visit, Biong said. "There will be no solution without Chad," Biong said flatly. GOSS/SPLM believe that Deby can play a constructive role, but only if Deby's differences with Khartoum are resolved, Biong explained.

¶11. (C) Regional Cooperation Minister Benjamin said Eritrea also recognizes that the SPLM has a "comparative advantage," at least in the early stages of a rejuvenated peace process. After extensive dialogue at senior levels between Juba and Asmara, Eritrea accepts that the process should be

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"Sudanized," Benjamin said. Eritrea would nevertheless still like to host any full-fledged negotiations that might follow the SPLM initiative, Benjamin explained. U.S. objections to talks in Asmara are well known, Landis replied. She also suggested that rather than moving talks out of Sudan, international and other participants could shuttle to and from the talks venue.

Venue and Security

¶12. (C) Venue is a serious question, the GOSS/SPLM officials told Landis. Juba is the easiest location in southern Sudan logistically, but has many shortcomings. A garrison town during the war, Juba remains rifled with Khartoum-directed security operatives. SPLM is looking for a venue where "there is no JIU," Biong said, in a reference to Sudan Armed Forces elements now attached to the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs). Many of the Darfur factions would be nervous meeting in Juba, Benjamin said. SPLM Task Force Secretary Achier said he would visit Yei, Rumbek and Wau to assess the feasibility of holding talks there. Landis cautioned that there will be many international observers and others who will want to attend and play a role. The logistics of

meeting outside of Juba would be very challenging, she said. Benjamin suggested that the most sensitive dialogues might occur at a location outside Juba, but that larger gatherings incorporating international observers could take place in the southern capital.

Message for Darfurians

¶13. (C) Landis asked Biong to clarify what kind of "political" support the SPLM required from the United States. Biong asked that we help "reduce the expectations of Darfurians that the international community will bail them out." Some factions, he said, would like to force international military intervention. Such groups would come to talks "only with the idea of buying time." Landis said she would review how the U.S. might deliver such a message to the Darfur factions.

Logistics and Money

¶14. (C) GOSS/SPLM will work with ConGen Juba staff to identify specific assistance the U.S. might provide the SPLM initiative, the officials told Landis. The SPLM had spent USD 150,000 of its own money so far, Achier said, and had presented several versions of an operating budget. The most recent budget is USD 1.5 million and is under review by UN officials and other donors. ConGen Juba will transmit a copy of the revised budget to Embassy Khartoum and the Department. Biong said GOSS/SPLM would welcome the secondment of a U.S. technical expert to the task force secretariat. The task force's secretary, Dr. Achier, said the group lacks office space and computers. The task force has been in dialogue with the UN, however, and the UN had identified a fund, administered locally in Juba by UNICEF, which could be used to channel donor assistance. Landis agreed with Achier's statement that donors should "facilitate not complicate" the initiative.

¶15. (C) Landis underscored that there is intense international interest in the GOSS/SPLM's efforts. Salva Kiir is due to visit Norway May 29, she noted, and Norway has invited the U.S. and other donors to meet Kiir there and discuss the GOSS/SPLM initiative. Landis urged GOSS/SPLM to treat the Norway meeting as something of a donor conference, and be ready with specific guidance on what assistance is needed. Finally, Landis noted that the Swiss-based Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) is organizing a meeting for various Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) elements in Nairobi sometime in the next two weeks to help the SLA harmonize its internal positions. She urged GOSS/SPLM to send a participant in the CHD meeting. Benjamin said GOSS/SPLM had not heard from CHD but did not object to their efforts.

Comment

¶16. (C) GOSS/SPLM bring good intentions and generally sound

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analysis to thorny problem of Darfur. Their capacity constraints are real, however. We welcome the Department's support for this initiative and will provide the requested "wish list" of human and material assistance as soon as possible. End Comment.

¶17. (C) Senior Representative to Sudan Landis was not able to review or clear this message before transmission.
POWERS